With a preface by Gary Younge

The Crises of Multiculturalism
Racism in a Neoliberal Age
Alana Lentin and Gavan Titley

PAUL MASON

WHY IT'S KICKING OFF EVERYWHERE
THE NEW GLOBAL REVOLUTIONS

OFFICIAL SELECTION
SUNDANCE FILM FESTIVAL

A FILM BY IAN PALMER

KNUCKLE

'FORGET GUY RITCHIE –
THIS IS BLOODY, BRUTAL
AND, ABOVE ALL, REAL'
TIME OUT

'EPIC...GRIPPING,
GRITTY... HEART
WRENCHING'
SOUND
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TWELVE YEARS. THREE CLANS. ONE WAR.

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workers solidarity movement

summer 2012 issue ●●●●●●●●

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welcome to/

..................The Irish Anarchist Review

Welcome to Irish Anarchist Review issue 5, produced by the Workers Solidarity Movement. In this magazine we look to explore theories, thoughts and ideas about political struggle. We set out to analyse where we are aiming for as a revolutionary movement and explore how we might get there. The purpose of 'Irish Anarchist Review' is to act as forum for a sharing of ideas about revolutionary struggle. Building a successful revolution demands genuine discussion, debate and sharing of ideas. We hope that the articles in here will help to stimulate discussion and provoke debate and perhaps even motivate some of our readers to respond with articles of your own.

As we head into the second half of 2012, we have seen the awakening in Ireland of a renewed sense of political hope. The campaign against the household tax has established itself firmly all across the 26 Counties and has brought large numbers of people never previously involved in anything into political organising. In establishing local campaign groups in our areas, in discussing political and organisational ideas with our neighbours and in challenging the powers of the state, we are beginning to realise the strength we have in organising together and many of us are seeing for the first time the real truth behind the old Irish proverb 'Ní neart go gur le chéile' – There is no strength without unity. Over the coming months, the Campaign Against Household and Water Taxes will face many battles. It is by organising it on truly democratic and participatory lines that we can all ensure that it is strong enough to win those battles.

In Mark Hoskins' article 'Single Issue Campaigns, Community Syndicalism and Direct Democracy', he explores what is meant by participatory or direct democracy and how to make the demand for direct democracy relevant to the day to day struggles and campaigns that people are involved in. As people get involved in struggles such as the campaign against the household tax they begin to see that the state apparatus is not on our side and neither is it a neutral intermediary between the haves and the have-nots. Thus the necessity for building alternative forms of organisation becomes obvious. Involvement in campaigns, participation in decision making and use of direct action tactics are all encouraged by anarchists both as the most effective way to advance particular struggles but also as a means by which people begin to get a real sense of their own power.

In communities across Ireland people who have got involved in the struggle against the household tax are beginning to get that sense. For anarchists one of the challenges is to ensure that what Mark describes as 'the battle….between democratic and authoritarian methods of organising' is won by those who advocate true participatory democracy and that the campaign is not diverted down an electoral cul de sac by which all decision making is channelled through a local 'leadership'.

In his review of Paul Mason's book 'Why It's Kicking Off Everywhere', Andrew Flood looks at the concept of the 'Networked Individual' and explores the extent to which modern communications technology has impacted on people's ability to organise in a non-hierarchical manner. He goes on to look at the impact of this on the role of a revolutionary organisation and indeed on the type of revolutionary organisation needed in the era of the 'networked individual'. For example with the ease of one to many internet communications does the size of a revolutionary organisation matter any longer? The coherent anarchist organisation, he concludes, "aims to be a scaffold along which many of the major nodes of a network can rapidly grow and link up as they are needed…"

Sean Matthews in his piece casts a critical eye over the contribution of workers' co-operatives and social centres to the development of libertarian communist ideas. Acknowledging that workers' co-ops have always been championed by sections of the left, and that they can potentially provide a glimpse of "self-management, direct democracy and mutual aid in action…" he argues that we "should not be blinded by their contradictions and should query their effectiveness as a strategy for real revolutionary transformation."

As we look to build a free and democratic future for ourselves and our children and grandchildren, it is useful to look back at where we have come from and to analyse the political ideas and struggles that have brought us to where we are. As a contribution to such analysis, Fin Dwyer exposes the story of the early years of Ireland's independence as being "…one of a dark authoritarian regime based on repression, discrimination and censorship where the elite of nationalist Ireland re-established control over a society that had teetered on the verge of revolution for years…" This is the first of a two-part series which will be continued in IAR6.

In a though-provoking piece which challenges all of us to "…look at ourselves on a personal level, recognise privilege and develop a wider critique that is truer to our own politics…" Dónal O Driscoll explores "what it means to be anti-racist from an anarchist perspective." He explores two important principles of anti-racism - the recognition that many of us have privileges simply because of our skin colour or ethnic group and the challenge of giving voice to the oppressed.

Linked to this, Aidan Rowe reviews "The Crises of Multiculturalism: Racism in a Neoliberal Age", arguing that "a sophisticated understanding of how racism works under neoliberal governance is key if we are to win the 'battle of ideas' against those who would use racism to divide and control us…." And Shane O'Curry reviews a film that he "approached ….with a lot of trepidation, putting off watching it for weeks". "Knuckle" is described as "an epic 12-year journey into the brutal and secretive world of Irish Traveller bare-knuckle fighting…." but Shane's review concludes that it is "an absolutely captivating film, taking the viewer into spaces largely hidden from the outside world. Here, we are much more intimate with Traveller men than in any other film (that I have seen, anyway)…"

We hope that you, the reader, will find the articles in this magazine interesting and thought-provoking. We hope that they will contribute to a further development and understanding of anarchist politics. We don't want the magazine to be a one-way street but would welcome feedback and comment on any of the articles or on any issues that you feel should be covered in future issues of Irish Anarchist Review.

Read and enjoy!   WORDS : GREGOR KERR

about the wsm/

The Workers Solidarity Movement was founded in Dublin, Ireland in 1984 following discussions by a number of local anarchist groups on the need for a national anarchist organisation. At that time with unemployment and inequality on the rise, there seemed every reason to argue for anarchism and for a revolutionary change in Irish society. This has not changed.

Like most socialists we share a fundamental belief that capitalism is the problem. We believe that as a system it must be ended, that the wealth of society should be commonly owned and that its resources should be used to serve the needs of humanity as a whole and not those of a small greedy minority. But, just as importantly, we see this struggle against capitalism as also being a struggle for freedom. We believe that socialism and freedom must go together, that we cannot have one without the other.

Anarchism has always stood for individual freedom. But it also stands for democracy. We believe in democratising the workplace and in workers taking control of all industry. We believe that this is the only real alternative to capitalism with its ongoing reliance on hierarchy and oppression and its depletion of the world's resources.

Single Issue Campaigns, Community Syndicalism & Direct Democracy/

There's been a lot of talk lately about participatory and direct democracy. Renewed interest in alternative forms of organising society has arisen from increasing dissatisfaction with mainstream politics and the domination of the economy by a few corporations.

WORDS :
MARK HOSKINS

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This dissatisfaction has found its expression in the Arab spring, the May 15th movement in Spain and the Occupy movement in the English-speaking world. Where the anti-capitalist movement of the last decade focussed almost exclusively on the power of the corporations and finance capital, this current tendency is to also focus on politics and the state.

The movement in the English speaking world has exhibited many difficulties: The rejection of previous organisational forms and aversion to traditional politics, while understandable given the history of the authoritarian left, has led to any political philosophy with a historical basis being shunned. The result has been that a new generation of activists have been fumbling in the dark for a way to change society, unable to see the writing on the wall: "Not all old ideas are bad ideas".

Another problem has been the tendency to start with general, sometimes abstract demands. Demanding direct democracy doesn't mean much to a person whose main concern is keeping their children fed and clothed, while demanding the IMF get out of Ireland is all very well but it's at best aspirational and doesn't really come with an alternative. So how do we make the demand for direct democracy relevant to day to day life? How do we make people see the necessity of fighting against capitalism and the state?

Non-Hierarchical

Anarchists believe it is important to oppose hierarchy in all its forms and replace the current socio-economic system with a democratic non-hierarchical society. This would entail the replacement of top-down managerial structures in the workplace and authoritarian forms of power such as the state, but we don't expect people just to start waving red and black flags because we're sure we're right. We want people to see for themselves what Anarchism is like in action. The presence of Anarchists in campaigns helps spread libertarian ideas and show their superiority to organisational forms advocated by authoritarian socialists.

There are three main reasons for Anarchists to get involved in single issue campaigns: To show that Anarchist methods can work in practice, to give people a sense of their own power, and, ultimately, to build horizontally-structured organisations capable of replacing hierarchical state and corporate systems. Moreover the involvement in struggle is a learning process for experienced organisers and first time ac-

tivists alike. Only when ideas are put to the test can we see which ones are relevant and which aren't. Last year many different ideas of what direct democracy entailed were tested by the occupy movement. Some embodied the tyranny of structurelessness and led to small informal leaderships taking over, while others provided an example of how tightly organised structures can work in practice. The problems of fetishising the consensus process were also exposed as it was found to be a cumbersome and often undemocratic form of decision-making.

The main lesson that those involved in social struggle will learn, however, is that the State and capital, with their many tentacles of control, are not on our side. First-time activists in the Campaign against Household and Water Taxes will have learned that the mainstream media is not there to report the truth, but rather to put across whatever message is desired by the state and corporate media bosses. Throughout the campaign, RTÉ have shamelessly presented the government's fudged figures as fact and halved the numbers involved in the protest at the Fine Gael Ard Fheis in their report of the event. The role of the Gardaí was revealed to some of those who attended the protest at the Labour Party conference, when pepper spray was used against activists.

Democracy?

More generally, the campaign has revealed that despite what we were brought up to believe, the state is not what democracy looks like. More people are boycotting the Household Tax than voted for the Government. It wasn't in the manifestos of the governing parties, so no one voted for it. Yet there is no sign of it being abolished and those who refuse to pay are being threatened with court appearances and large fines.

When people see that the state is not on our side, that it is not even a neutral intermediary between us (the majority) and them (the wealthy minority), they begin to see the importance of building an alternative society, and involvement in campaigns that utilise direct action can give them a sense of their power to do that.

As the Italian Anarchist, Errico Malatesta wrote:

"Whatever may be the practical results of the struggle for immediate gains, the greatest value lies in the struggle itself. For thereby workers learn that the bosses interests are opposed to theirs and that they cannot improve their conditions, and much less emancipate themselves, except by uniting and becoming stronger than the bosses. If they succeed in getting what they demand, they will be better off: they will earn more, work fewer hours and will have more time and energy to reflect on the things that matter to them, and will immediately make greater demands and have greater needs. If they do not succeed they will be led to study the reasons of their failure and recognise the need for closer unity and greater activity and they will in the end understand that to make victory secure and definite, it is necessary to destroy capitalism. The revolutionary cause, the cause of moral elevation and emancipation of the workers must benefit by the fact that workers unite and struggle for their interests." [Malatesta, Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas, p. 191]

Identifying the problem also poses the question of a solution. Organising their own campaigns not only gives people confidence but it also gives them the skills necessary to create and administer

a society that is designed to meet their needs. If struggle is a school of self-governance, then the means employed must correspond to the desired end. This is one area where Anarchists are often at odds with authoritarian socialists. The latter believe that in order to achieve socialism there must be a vanguard party, with "the correct leadership" directing struggle from above. While they often give lip service to workers' democracy, this usually either means that they will put that into place sometime after they take power or that it equates to the power of the vanguard party. Authoritarian methods of organising resistance, however, can only give birth to authoritarian "revolutions" and new forms of authoritarian society. A movement that does not trust the working class to direct its own struggles, to create the type of society that reflects its desires and needs, will not easily relinquish power after it has seized it in the name of the class. Just as a truly socialist society would mould itself around people's needs, so too must the way we fight for that society.

Issues and Solutions

Community syndicalism (or unionism) is a process of creating the structures of a new society within the old. It involves people organising locally to raise issues affecting the community and finding solutions to them. It encourages all members of a community to involve themselves in tackling the issues that they face in their daily lives without the need for the intervention of so-called representatives like TDs or councillors. It creates a localised form of dual power that is counterposed to traditional hierarchical forms. Community syndicates can also provide valuable support for strikes in the field of industry.

The community syndicate would ideally be based upon the mass assembly of members, where issues like local services, education, rent etc. could be debated and decisions made on how best to win improvements. Beyond the locality, the syndicate should federate with similar organisations in other areas to collaborate on campaigns that have a wider scope. Each syndicate would send delegates to the federal assembly with a strict mandate and the right to recall and elect new delegates in their place if they abuse their mandate.

A recent example of community syndicalism in

action comes from the 2001 revolt in Argentina. Local assemblies were set up and federated to co-ordinate struggles. They occupied buildings and created communal kitchens, community centres, day-care centres and built links with occupied workplaces. As one participant noted people "[began] to solve problems themselves, without turning to the institutions that caused the problems in the first place." The neighbourhood assemblies ended a system in which "we elected people to make our decisions for us . . . now we will make our own decisions."

The History of the CNT in Spain, particularly in Catalunya, is littered with examples of community syndicalism in action. The CNT is usually thought of as primarily an industrial union, but at one time it had strong organisations in every working-class neighbourhood in Barcelona. This was made possible by the reorganisation of the confederation at its 1918 congress where district committees based in union centres in the neighbourhoods were established. Organisers were known as "the eyes and ears of the union in the neighbourhood". Within a year the national membership had doubled to 715,000, with 250,000 alone in Barcelona. Organising in this manner provided valuable support for the industrial unions of the confederation. In 1919 a strike broke out at the Ebro irrigation and power company after a small number of workers were sacked for union membership. In response, all CNT power workers walked off the job. The local federation mobilised and what started as a small-scale industrial dispute turned into open class war on a city-wide scale. Chris Ealham writes in his book Anarchism and the City: Revolution and Counter Revolution in Barcelona 1898 to 1937 that "much of the state's repressive arsenal was mobilised; martial law was implemented and following the militarization of essential services, soldiers replaced strikers and up to 4,000 workers were jailed." (pp 41.)

However, the CNT's vast network of neighbourhood syndicates allowed it to raise financial support and requisition food and other essentials. The strike was able to hold out long enough to cripple industry in the city and the state was obliged to step in, forcing the power company to capitulate to the demands of the CNT which now moved beyond the reinstatement of the workers and union recog-

At the moment, in places [the CAHWT] resembles an embryonic form of community syndicalism. It's at its best where activists groups are organised in a directly demo-cratic manner, where all members who wish to participate can and all have equal say in decision-making

nition to pay rises, the payment of wages lost during the strike and an amnesty for all those involved in pickets. Furthermore, the strike created such fear among the ruling-class that the government became the first in Europe to introduce the eight-hour day in an attempt to avoid further class conflict. What began as a single issue was generalised into a battle for improved conditions for workers all over the city.

In 1931, the CNT led a rent strike in Barcelona, which demanded a 40% rent decrease. This began with a mass meeting on May 1st and by August there were 100,000 participants. As well as the boycott of rent, they organised to resist and reverse evictions. Many landlords, finding their income streams drying up, gave into the demands and waived unpaid rents from the period of the strike.

More recently, and closer to home, the Anti-Poll Tax Federation in the UK and the anti-water tax campaign in Ireland were organised along lines that closely resembled community syndicalism. In the case of the former campaign, some local groups outlived the single issue. One of these still in existence is the Haringey Solidarity Group. They are far from being a mass community union but they do have a contact list of thousands and campaign both on local and broader issues.

Lessons

Of course, there is no point in citing historical examples if we do not draw lessons from them that we can apply to the present. There are obvious differences between Barcelona in the first half of the last century and Ireland today. The example cited in Argentina took place during a period of revolution, not a single issue campaign and the Haringey Solidarity Group organised at a time of defeat for the working-class.

Today, the Campaign against Household and Water Taxes in Ireland is organised on a national scale. At the moment, in places its organisation resembles an embryonic form of community syndicalism. It's at its best where activists groups are organised in a directly democratic manner, where all members who wish to participate can and all have equal say in decision-making. Many local areas have begun the process of federating, with mandated delegates being sent to county-wide meetings.

With the announcement that water meters will be installed by the end of the year and will have to be paid for by householders, it is clear that this will become a protracted battle. Within the campaign, the battle will be between democratic and authoritarian methods of organising. In communities, the battle will be to win non-payers to the idea of local activism. With the right structure and a mass campaign membership, what is already the biggest boycott movement the country has seen since the Land League could be a force with far more power than any so-called workers' party participating in elections could ever achieve.

With a victory under its belt, or even by holding its own in a long, drawn-out struggle, such an organisation could draw other groups under its wing. By drawing in workers engaged in occupations such as the Vita Cortex workers, it could begin to develop an industrial wing. Working with groups like unlockNAMA, which is already organised along directly democratic lines, could lead to the opening of community centres and, in harsh times, communal kitchens. Such an organisation could eventually by pass the bureaucratic monoliths that are the mainstream unions and organise strikes.

Ultimately such an organisation would be a libertarian communist society in embryo. It would have to overcome modern problems such as suburbanisation and rebuild the idea of community, but if organised in every neighbourhood, along with an industrial wing it would have the wherewithal to bypass the capitalist state and create a new society within the old.

Of course this would inevitably bring it into open conflict with the state. It would be the role of an Anarchist organisation like the WSM to work within such an organisation, to spread the revolutionary anarchist idea that the state cannot just be bypassed, it must eventually be smashed or it will ruthlessly crush us and our movement.

All this is aspirational, but it is possible if we put all our efforts into building community syndicalism. If we win the argument for libertarian ideas in the Household Tax Campaign we have the opportunity to build a powerful national federation of communities and workers. There is no point in having a new world in our hearts if we don't strive to create it in the here and now. This is just the beginning.

Torture, Murder & Exclusion:
Ireland's first 10 years of Independence

The 1916 proclamation, the manifesto of the 1916 rebels, states:

"The Republic guarantees religious and civil liberty, equal rights and equal opportunities to all its citizens, and declares its resolve to pursue the happiness and prosperity of the whole nation and of all its parts, cherishing all the children of the nation equally, and oblivious of the differences carefully fostered by an alien government, which have divided a minority from the majority in the past."

These noble aspirations would become almost a bible of Irish Republican ideals and within six years, after the end of the War of Independence in 1922, a section of that movement had a chance to implement these ideals. However the society established after the war of independence "The Irish Free State" was a pale shadow of even the most modest interpretation of this document. Civil liberties were almost non existent, citizens were not equal, with women becoming second class while the poor were plunged further into destitution.

The early story of the Irish Free State is one of a dark authoritarian regime based on repression, discrimination and censorship where the elite of nationalist Ireland re-established control over a society that had teetered on the verge of revolution for years. Their deeply authoritarian attitude to politics was underscored by severe catholic morality which stifled culture and allowed no political debate or opposition of any kind. By 1937 the "The Irish Free State" had created a society that had betrayed the ideals of what many had set out to achieve two decades earlier.

Over two articles Fin Dwyer will examine the path which saw revolutionary Ireland descend into conservative authoritarianism, first looking at the establishment of the state through the civil war and its aftermath and then, in the next issue, looking at its social programme in the later 20's and 1930's

War of Independence and Revolution

Within a few years of the 1916 rebellion the Irish Republican movement found itself transformed from a relatively marginal group to being one of the key political forces in early 20th century Ireland. In 1917 when the British Army faced a manpower crisis in World War I conscription was threatened in Ireland. This was deeply unpopular and the Republican movement grew quickly as they had consistently and militantly opposed World War I since its outbreak in 1914.

The movement grew from strength to strength and by 1919 a full-scale war of Independence was under way. Over the following two years the basis of British power in Ireland collapsed and groups traditionally frozen out of society began to assert their power, most notably women and workers.

In the decade before independence women had made great strides in their struggle for equality. Af-

WORDS:
FIN DWYER

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ter years of struggle, albeit with opposition, women were forcing their way into politics best symbolised by the republican socialist Constance Markievicz, who was the first woman elected to the house of Commons in the 1918 election. Markievicz's formal role as a military leader during the 1916 rebellion would have been unthinkable in the previous century. This surge of activity from women was reflected through the ranks of the republican movement with women's organisations like Cumann na mBan and Inghinidhe na hÉireann.

Cumann na mBan

Although not feminist in any sense of the word their very existence showed a marked change from the last period of radicalism in Ireland in the 1880's when women had struggled to get any acknowledgement for their participation in the Land War of 1879 -1882. The Ladies Land League was castigated by nearly all sections of society and only received limited acknowledgement when the Land League itself was proscribed. While women's liberation had a long way to go through the second decade of the 20th century, change seemed imminent. This mood was reflected by the fact that equality of the sexes was enshrined in both the 1919 democratic programme of the first Dáil and the 1922 constitution.

The other group in society to surge forward was Ireland's organised Labour Movement. Although resoundingly defeated in 1913 during the Dublin Lock Out, by 1919 the Trade Union movement in Ireland had been reorganised and was immensely powerful. Aside from IRA activity, organised labour had played a prominent role during the war of Independence. Along with numerous general strikes including one in support of IRA hunger strikes in 1920, there were 233 other strikes that same year and even the establishment of an albeit brief workers' soviet in Limerick in 1919. They also played a crucial role in the war itself when transport unions refused to transport war supplies or soldiers for the British Army.

The Birth of The Free State

After years of conflict, strikes and assassinations a temporary truce was called in 1921 between the IRA and the British Government. This was followed by negotiations which produced the famous Anglo Irish Treaty. It clearly fell short of the aims of the Republican movement. The six counties that today form Northern Ireland were to remain part of the United Kingdom while Ireland was not to become a Republic but a "Free State" within the British Empire.

When the document was debated in Ireland it created huge division. The Dáil (the Irish Parliament) eventually narrowly passed the treaty 56-48.

Post Independence Hopes

After independence both women and workers had high hopes that the society being forged in Ireland would protect their new found power but over the following decade these groups were harshly suppressed by the new Irish government. Ireland's new political elite would effectively hope to turn the clock back and enforce the status quo that had existed in Ireland years if not decades before the war of Independence.

However, first to learn the authoritarian nature of the new state were the former comrades of the new government who opposed the treaty. A few months after Independence a civil war broke out between the pro and anti-treaty sides which the new government fought in the most ferocious manner. Often seen as an internal fight within the Republican Movement the

Although resoundingly defeated in 1913 during the Dublin Lockout, by 1919 the Trade Union movement in Ireland had been re-organised and was immensely powerful.

civil war had immense ramifications for the wider society. The basic attitudes of how the new Irish elite would rule the Irish Free State were laid bare in what was a brutal struggle.

The build up to civil war

As soon as the Dáil ratified the treaty the President Eamon de Valera resigned and walked out uttering the words "I am not going to connive at setting up in Ireland another Government for England". He was soon joined by many other republican TDs who opposed the Treaty including Harry Boland, Constance Markievicz and Cathal Brugha. In their absence those republicans who supported the treaty set about establishing a government. Among the key figures were WT Cosgrave, Kevin O Higgins, Richard Mulcahy, Arthur Griffith and Michael Collins.

The first major challenge of the new government was how they would deal with opponents of the Treaty. These opponents, while in a minority, significantly had a majority of support within the army – the IRA. When senior anti-treaty members of the IRA called a convention on March 26th 1922, in spite of a government ban, 52 out of 73 brigades attended and rejected the Treaty, proclaiming the parliament had betrayed the republican ideal by ratifying the treaty.

Over the next few months the Free State reacted by establishing a new army – the National Army - to break its dependence on an organisation who it could not control and which clearly did not support it. In June an election was held in which the anti treaty side received 21% while the pro treaty side received almost 40% of the vote. While this was interpreted as a mandate by those in favour of the treaty, those opposed to the treaty were unmoved. Liam Mellows, an opponent of the treaty, remarked it was not the "will of the people" but "the fear of the people" in reference to the British threat to wreak a terrible war if the treaty was rejected.

For reasons beyond the scope of this article, which are highly debated among historians, the opposing sides ended up in conflict within a few days of the election, precipitated by the Free State's "National Army" shelling a 3 month IRA occupation of the Four courts on June 26th 1922. This was after 3 months of effort by groups within both camps to avoid conflict. Understanding the nature of this conflict is key to understanding the origins of the nature of Authoritarianism in Ireland after Independence.

The Civil War

It became evident very quickly that the Pro Treaty forces were going to emerge victorious. The Anti Treaty IRA's sole point of unity was that they opposed the Treaty. Identifying other goals which unified them is impossible as they encompassed republicans of both the left and right. This lack of unity hamstrung their ability to act. While the pro-Treaty side were also politically very diverse they had unity originating not the least from the fact that they could claim a mandate from the 1922 election.

Within a few weeks the I.R.A. forces were decisively defeated in Dublin and Cork city was captured on August 10th. By early August the overall threat being posed by the Anti-Treaty I.R.A. was diminishing given they had already lost every urban area and Liam Lynch the Chief of Staff of the IRA gave the order to resort to guerilla warfare on August 10th.

A few days later, Michael Collins, the key figure in the Free State Government, now a general in the National Army, was killed in an ambush in West Cork at Béal na mBláth on August 22nd 1922. His death unleashed and unmasked the true authoritarianism that lay behind the Free State government. Instead of trying to de-escalate a conflict they were clearly winning the authoritarianism of the government politicians demanded an absolute annihilation of the I.R.A.

Following Collins' death nearly a year of terrifying brutality saw the Free State National Army breach several articles of The Hague convention of 1907, the era's equivalent of the Geneva Convention. Far from the lofty heights of ensuring civil liberties for the people of Ireland they engaged in a campaign of brutal repression.

At Oriel house in Dublin, the Free State set up the Criminal Investigation Department where ex IRA members waged a campaign of torture and killings against anti-treaty republicans. After the killing of Collins they killed four republicans in Dublin and dumped their bodies. This would result in 21 deaths in Dublin alone by the end of the war. These activities were not just those of a few men who had gone off the edge, but that of a 250 strong force operating in Dublin city centre.

During the second half of 1922 the National Army made several naval landings into Munster where the IRA remained strongest. In a ruthless campaign prisoners were frequently executed. Again this cannot be explained away as just the activities of soldiers hardened by war, indeed far from it. By September 18th 1922 reports of the executions of prisoners were forwarded to cabinet but nothing was done save Richard Mulcahy agreeing to help remove soldiers who

had a problem with such activity. The activity was in effect condoned by Patrick Hogan Minister for Land and Agriculture when he said that the "national army are a little too ready to take prisoners".

Further to this the government itself passed legislation which effectively legalised similar executions. On 28th September the sitting members of the Dáil had overwhelming (48-18) endorsed legislation that removed jury trials for numerous activities and allowed military courts to try civilians with death sentences being handed down to those carrying weapons. On October 3rd they offered an amnesty lasting only two weeks before the military courts began a killing spree endorsed by cabinet which saw dozens of people executed.

Erskine Childers

On November 10th Erskine Childers, who had signed the treaty but opposed its recommendations, was arrested, tried and executed for being in possession of an ornamental gun given to him as a wedding present by Michael Collins himself. Worse was yet to come. The IRA responded in kind and on November 27th Liam Lynch issued an order that any TD who voted for this legislation, which was dubbed the "Murder Bill", was to be executed on sight. Two weeks later two government T.D.'s Sean Hales and Padraig O Máille were shot. Hales died of his wounds.

In response the government decided to execute four prominent republicans being held in Mountjoy jail in Dublin– Liam Mellows (IRA quarter master), Joe McKelvey (former IRA Chief of Staff) , Rory O'Connor (IRA director of Engineering) and Dick Barrett. The sentiment behind the government policy was outlined by WT Cosgrave in the statement "Terror will be met with Terror". Indeed nothing else could explain killing four men who could not possibly have had any involvement given they were in prison since the first weeks of the war. It has been argued that the time provoked desperate measures but even contemporaries thought it was unjustifiable. Thomas Johnson, leader of the Labour Party which was neutral in the civil war, described the enormity of what had happened:

"Murder most foul as in the best it is - but this most foul, bloody and unnatural. The four men in Mountjoy have been in your charge for five months……... the Government of this country—the Government of Saorstát Eireann, announces apparently with pride that they have taken out four men, who were in their charge as prisoners, and as a reprisal for that assassination murdered them……I wonder whether any member of the Government who has any regard for the honour of Ireland, or has any regard for the good name of the State, or has any regard for the safety of the State, will stand over an act of this kind."

By March 1923 as the Free State was unquestionably on the verge of victory they began to commit atrocities on an unprecedented scale in reaction to anti-treaty assassinations and attacks on property. In Kerry at Cahirciveen, Killarney and Countess Bridge horrific massacres of IRA prisoners were committed. The most notorious atrocity was that committed at Ballyseedy, Co. Kerry where the National Army tied 9 IRA prisoners to a bridge before detonating a landmine killing all except one - Stephen Fuller - who testified to the events later.

Excusable brutality?

The Civil war drew to a close in the early summer of 1923 and it was clear the Irish Free State had fallen far short of the aims of the 1916 proclamation or even far more timid aspirations. It has been argued that exceptional times called for exceptional measures, however it is hard to see how such measures could ever be justifiable or excusable. Even if it was justifiable it is difficult to see how the IRA posed such a threat to the state after Michael Collins' death (the period that saw the worst persecution) that warranted such a brutal response.

The Anti Treaty forces had always been seriously disunited and poorly armed with an arguably non existent strategy. One of the events that heightened tensions in the run up to war illustrated this. When an IRA unit occupied the Four Courts they were so disunited that when the IRA chief of staff Liam Lynch attempted to gain entry on the 19th of June he was locked out. Although Lynch eventually was able to repair the links with the four courts garrison it was indicative of wider problems that such squabbling was ongoing within days of the civil war breaking out.

Their disunity through the following months stopped them utilising their numerical strength. This was compounded by the fact several key figures within the anti Treaty movement including Rory O Connor, Liam Mellows, Joe McKelvey, Cathal Brugha and Paddy O Brien were captured or killed within a few days of the conflict starting. In essence they were strategically reactionary. Their sole innovative move was the Four Courts occupation in Spring 1922 after which they largely reacted to Free State activity: when the war started when the Free State attacked the Four Courts garrison, they reverted to guerilla warfare only after they had lost all urban centres and logically enough in this pattern they responded to state terror with terror.

In this situation the Free State dictated the pace and course of the war. Using state terror was clearly the worst path as the I.R.A. would respond in kind, illustrated by Liam Lynch issuing assassination orders on all T.D.s who had voted for what they called "The Murder Bill" or the the ferocious brutality illustrated when the IRA killed Kevin O Higgins' elderly father on February 10th 1923 in reprisal for the execution of 33 prisoners in January.

Indeed arguably it was this repression and brutality that allowed what was a disunited factious movement hold men as disparate as the communist Peader O Donnell and the conservative catholic Liam Lynch together. Had the Free State executed the war in a less authoritarian manner they could have surely undermined the basis of the IRA leadership. Aside from two brief amnesties in late 1922 and February 1923, which seem to have been more tokenistic than a real gesture to end the war, they fought in a manner which backed the anti treaty side into a corner. The brutality if anything played into the hands of militarists like Liam Lynch who argued for carrying on the war until they were utterly annihilated.

Why did the Free State choose this strategy?

While the majority resented the civil war, the manner in which the new state had exacted the war should have alarmed people. When Thomas Johnson the Labour leader vented his fury over the execution of Mellowes, Barret, O Connor and McKelvey in December 1922, he said "I am almost forced to say you have killed the new State at its birth" but he missed the point. They had not killed the state, quite the opposite.

They knew how weak the Anti Treaty forces were, indeed the secretary of the Free State Government Diarmuid O Hegarty said "The Government was, however, satisfied, that those forces contained within themselves elements of disruption that given time would accomplish their own disintegration". Yet they still ruthlessly crushed them. The Free State were well aware of what they were doing. The next ten years would show they had successfully laid the groundwork for a deeply authoritarian state in the civil war, one they would use to break all opposition regardless of its nature.

In this light their execution of the war did not augur well for the future, far from being the concern of Anti-treaty republicans it should have alarmed wider society. Over the following ten years they would apply an equally authoritarian outlook in enforcing their

view of society. Far from creating a stable society they forced well over half the population into an oppressive existence.

Free State in Power

By early 1923 victory was inevitable and the Pro Treaty forces began to look to the future. Since December the formation of a new party had been discussed and in April they reorganised themselves into a new political party – Cumann na nGaedheal. This new party was supposedly formed to transcend War of Independence politics, appealing to all sections of society including those who had been opposed to Independence. Whilst theoretically a nice idea it was in reality a rallying point for the conservative elite in Irish society who had been divided between loyalist and nationalist, now effectively a redundant divide. United in Cumann na nGaedheal they would set about re-establishing their authority after a decade of social radicalism. In office they would introduce a plethora of authoritarian reforms based on excluding various groups from society.

In May the I.R.A. all but accepted defeat when chief of staff Frank Aiken (Liam Lynch was killed in April) issued the order to dump arms on May 24th. Over the next few months state executions and torture tailed off – although Noel Lemass was executed and dumped by Free State forces in Dublin as late as the summer of 1923. Comfortable in their power, having annihilated and terrified the opposition, elections were held in August 1923.

The results were only mediocre for Cumann na nGaedheal. Given that many Anti Treaty republican candidates were in prison, on the run or, in the case of Eamon de Valera, arrested when trying to electioneer, the fact that Cumann na nGaedheal only returned with 39% was a poor showing. Lacking a majority they could only rule because the Anti-Treaty republicans refused to sit in the parliament they saw as lacking legitimacy.

Cumann na nGaedheal in Government

Although the president of the administration was W.T. Cosgrave, the Cumann na nGaedheal government was increasingly under the influence of the highly conservative faction centred around the authoritarian Kevin O Higgins who famously quipped that Cumann na nGaedheal were the "most conservative-minded revolutionaries that ever put through a successful revolution". If anyone had any hope they would fulfil the 1916 ideal to "pursue the happiness and prosperity of the whole nation and of all its parts" they were about to be sorely disappointed. The authoritarianism that governed their policy in the Civil War was now to be turned on society at large.

Mary McSwiney Demonstration

Their willingness to use authoritarian measures on the civilian population had been displayed as early as November 1922. When the anti-treaty activist Mary McSwiney was interned this caused public anger. The 50 year old McSwiney, was one of the most famous female republican activists hailing from the same family as the republican martyr, former Lord Mayor of Cork Terence McSwiney, who had died on hunger strike during the war of Independence in 1920. When McSwiney went on hunger strike in prison on November 4th, a demonstration was called to protest against her incarceration. On November 9th a large demonstration of women gathered in Dublin city centre. With no apparent provocation the National Army arrived and fired shots at the demonstration. Although no one was killed, 14 were injured in the ensuing

By the mid 20s Cumann na nGaedheal had eliminated all organised political opposition.

stampede.

Post office strike

The state's use of authoritarian measures was increasingly evident not just through its prosecution of the civil war but also the way it dealt with internal dissent. In September 1922 , 10,000 postal workers went on strike provoked by a government wage cut. The reaction of the government was all too predictable as the army were sent in to break the strike, with armed guards threatening strikers on picket lines.

The rural poor were also an early victim of Cumann na nGaedheal in power. Hoping to cultivate a support base with larger farmers in Ireland, they supported these farmers in their ongoing attempts to drive down the wages of landless agricultural labourers. These labourers formed around 23% of the rural workforce. As a class they had been the big losers during the land war of the 1880's as they could not benefit from reforms that allowed farmers buy land given they had none. Their attempts to gain a stake in Irish rural society through organising themselves in the ITGWU (The Irish Transport and General Workers Union) in the early 20th century was fiercely resisted by farmers.

In 1923 farmers, emboldened by the knowledge that the Free State would support them, locked out thousands of unionised labourers in attempts to drive down wages. In Athy, Co. Kildare when farmers locked out 350 labourers the National Army arrested the ITGWU branch secretary in the area. When a farmer was attacked and a threshing machine damaged 8 trade unionists were arrested and held for 3 months without trial or charge.

Waterford Lockout

Later in the year when 1500 labourers were locked out in Waterford the response was similar. The state sent in 600 Soldiers and the entire of East Waterford was put under a curfew between 11p.m. and 5:30 am. Meanwhile nothing was done to stop vigilantes organised by farmers called "White Guards" attacking union organisers across the county. The Farmers, backed by the state, emerged victorious and crushed the union.

This, accompanied by high unemployment, broke the power of organised rural labour. The ITGWU's membership halved in the following three years. This was reflected by the fact that within 5 years days lost to strike action were reduced by 95%. In the absence of Unions, the government clearly had no interest in their welfare and the labourers had no one to argue their corner. This saw their living standards plummet. There was a 10% fall in agricultural labourers' wages between 1922 and 1926 and a further 10% in the following 5 years. These policies saw a whole section of the rural population – the labourers - disappear through emigration, little wonder given their income had fallen by 20% between 1923 and 31.

The Urban Poor

If their despicable attitude toward the rural poor was devastating their ambivalence to the urban poor proved fatal. The desperate living standards of the urban poor was the greatest single social issue facing "The Free State" in 1923. The tenement population in Dublin lived in crushing poverty. However instead of helping the poorest of the poor the government focused on building houses for the middle classes, which saw the expansion of the suburbs on the fringes of Dublin. Little was done to alleviate the conditions among the urban poor in Dublin. Housing construction was largely privatised and thus little was done to alleviate the desperate squalor in which people lived as they could never afford housing.

Shockingly Dublin Corporation only built an average of 483 houses a year between 1923 and 1933. This led to the deterioration of housing conditions. In 1926, when a census was conducted, over a third of the population of Dublin lived in housing conditions with an average of 4 people per room. This disregard for overcrowding was worsened by their tax approach. Appealing to the rich in society the Free State, short of money, unbelievably reduced income tax from what was 27% to 15% and instead turned to levying finances indirectly, which had a greater impact on the poor. The outcome of theses policies was revealed in 1926 when the shocking statistic of an infant mortality rate of 12% among children younger than one in urban areas was revealed. The authoritarian, callous attitude of Free State politicians and their indifference would allow this to continue unaddressed with its devastating consequences.

By the mid 20's Cumann na nGaedheal had eliminated all organised political opposition. This had begun in their vicious conflict with their former comrades in the republican movement but was expanded to wider opposition once torture and repression had broken the Anti-treatyites. The labour movement had next faced similar annihilation by ferocious attacks which in turn exposed the entire working class to direct attack. Satisfied at having suppressed all economic radicalism, from the mid 1920's they would increasingly focus on social issues and far from resting on their laurels the Cumann na nGaedheal Government would go on to enforce its narrow catholic doctrines on women in a conflict that would have some of the furthest reaching consequences for Irish society. This will be covered in the next issue of IAR…
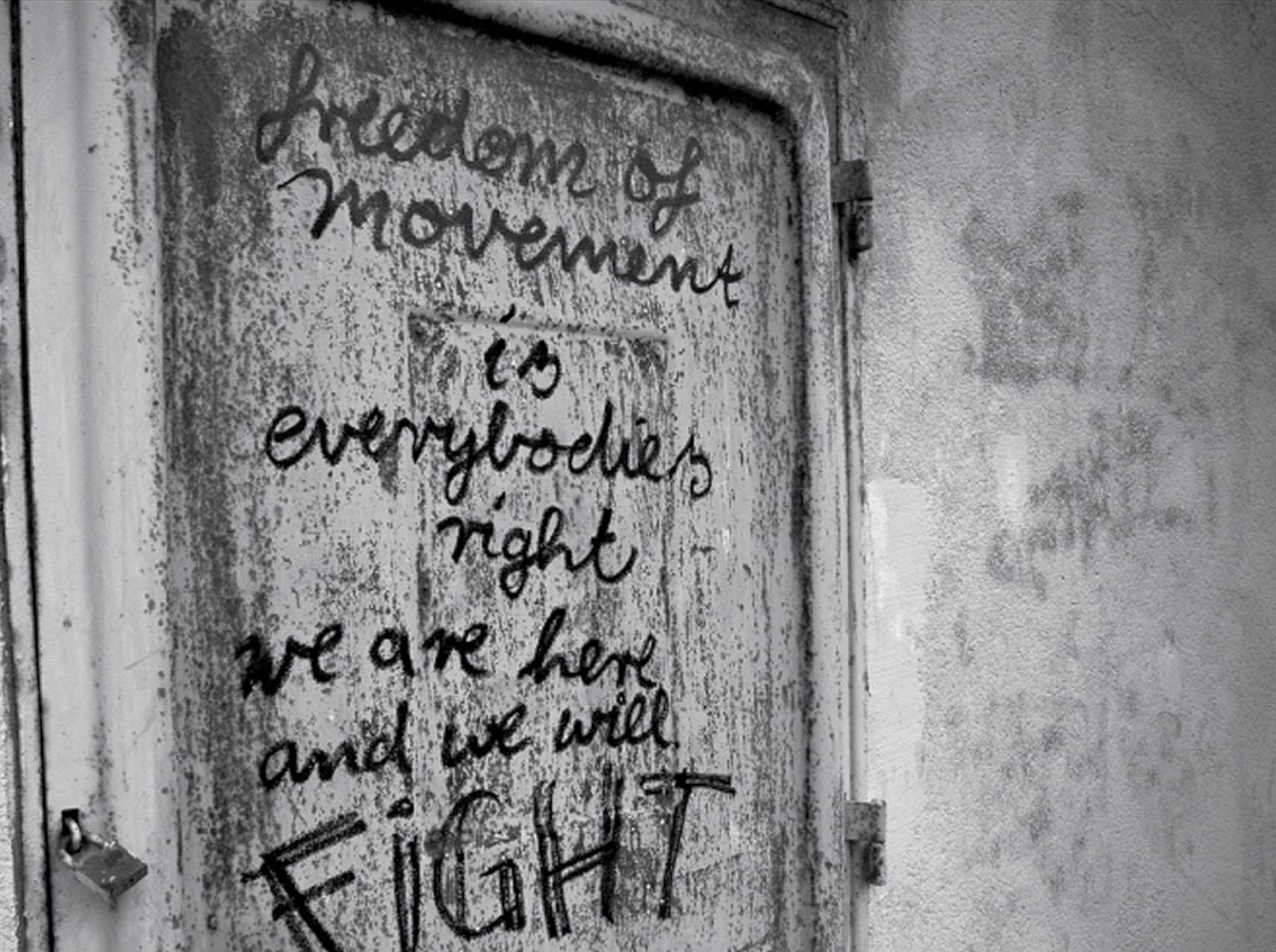
Towards an anarchist anti-racism

While there is a tradition of grassroots campaigning against racism in Ireland, there is less discussion of what it means to be an anti-racist from an anarchist perspective.

WORDS :
DONAL O'DRISCOLL

Most material focuses on obvious forms such as hate-speech or supporting travellers & migrants in practical terms. The issue this article seeks to raise, is that in order to get it right we also need to look at ourselves on a personal level, recognise privilege and develop a wider critique that is truer to our own politics. As such I am writing as a white anarchist, to other white anarchists.

To state the obvious: we anarchists are against racism - or at least we proclaim to be in every statement that seeks to set out a policy of inclusion. That is, we, the predominantly white people who rarely experience racial prejudice, proclaim it.

But is that necessarily true in fact? The implicit assumption is that espousing anarchist politics is sufficient to be anti-racist, but do we check if that is actually the case? Do do we ask those who are on the receiving end of oppression if we are actually creating non-racist spaces?

Unfortunately, there are distinctions that we often gloss over to avoid somewhat uncomfortable truths. Anti-racism, I argue, needs more than class analysis to be effectively combated.
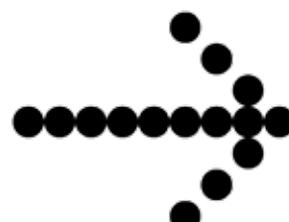
What is Racism?

There are several types of racism. First, there is the

overt discrimination based on seeing someone as inferior because of a perceived difference, usually to do with ethnicity. This ranges from hate speech and direct abuse, not treating people equally in employment or in the statements that use generalisations that tar entire groups of people with the same brush.

The second is the institutionalised racism that comes with more subtle forms of government or company policy, which appear to treat everyone as equal but actually disadvantage particular groups. In this, it is not the individuals, but the entire system that perpetuates discrimination for its own purposes.

The third is the internalised racism of society, a cultural racism, that manifests itself in all sorts of hidden ways, particularly in privileges that we are so used to that we are effectively blind to them.

The first two are relatively easy to recognise for those of us coming from an anarchist background. Through our work on class and anti-State politics, we can see the oppression inherent in such institutions - immigration policies being the standard one, but also social policy such as education. The analysis of discrimination against one group of people is relatively easily applied to others. A clear example is the treatment of travellers who face coercion by state organisations for not conforming to a particular set of norms and live in a country where the use of derisive names such as 'knackers' is seen as acceptable.

As such, the ways to challenge, name and reject these forms of racism are fairly straight-forward. It sits easily with our existing critiques of domination and is easily incorporated, as if that was enough. It is the third aspect that is not caught in this net and slips through as we believe we have done enough. However, it is this that forms the core of much anti-racist organisation and theory globally. At the very centre is the notion of privilege.

Repoliticising Racism

A problem facing anarchists is that much of the realm in which racism is experienced, and anti-racism needs to take place, is the liberal sphere. All too easily, the espousal of equality for all is co-opted and depoliticised: turned into self-serving bureaucracies that simply maintain the privileges of the dominant group.

The Israeli-Irish commentator Ronit Lentin puts this nicely:1

> "However, one of the most important questions asked in relation to antiracism is 'who speaks for whom, who says what and from where?' Antiracism can be either generalised – intending to raise awareness among the population and reach a post-racial 'racelessness', or colour blindness. Or it can be self-representational, where the lived experience of the racialised informs the struggle. Generalist antiracism is anchored in universal values such as democracy, human rights, equality and tolerance; it reduces the importance of state racism and emphasises individual (or institutional) prejudice. In contrast, self organising antiracism stresses the role of the state, which focuses on notions of the race idea rooted in the political structure. The lived experience of the protagonists informs the struggle and names the state as the main culprit rather than stress individual prejudice, a way of depoliticising racism and antiracism."

As she points out elsewhere, many of the anti-racist groups in Ireland are led by white, middle-class people, not by the people they are meant to be representing.

Thus, part of the role that anarchists can and should be playing is ensuring that racism is not depoliticised as an issue. Anarchism's emphasis on self-organisation and critique of the state means that this can be accommodated within our existing politics. Though it is not as straight-forward as we like to think: to be effective 'allies', it is important that we do not depoliticise it unwittingly in our own actions.

An Anarchist Anti-Racism?

Anarchism brings a recognition of how class, state and capitalism play a role in creating and maintaining oppression of many kinds. However, eliminating these three problems will not simply 'solve' racism. We still have to confront our own privilege, but with the added challenge of staying true to our own political framework.

There has been a lot of exploration of cultural racism and how it can be challenged from a radical perspective – see the writings of Audre Lorde, bell hooks and Lena Dominelli for example. What has emerged is a theory based around privilege and challenging existing hierarchies.

Thus, anti-racism includes two important principles. The first is to recognize that we have privileges simply because of our skin colour or ethnic group. We may not like that we have those privileges due to something we could not control – being born – but the first step is not denying that we have them.

The second principle is giving voice to the oppressed, not speaking on their behalf or seeking to dictate how they should define or resist their oppression.

Both work hand in hand and make demands of us, often uncomfortable ones as we are being asked to face up to things on personal level. It requires that we take a back seat in driving the politics and also that we are proactive in challenging ourselves.

There are increasing amounts of resources available, much of which can be adapted to the particular context of racism within Ireland, and which are generally applicable to combating forms of discrimination other than racism.

By focusing around the issue of voices and privilege, these can be incorporated into an effective anarchist anti-racism: one that does not merely pay lip-service to the idea. There are, however, several issues of particular relevance to us:

'Colour-blindness'

Because we perceive ourselves as anti-racist, we often act as if someone's skin colour or other ethnic feature is not there. We want to be 'colourblind', so to speak. The problem is: this ignores the fact that the other person's colour is a real feature, part of their identity, and affects them in their daily interactions. It is not a neutral thing, and by us pretending that it is, we are denying their experience from their point of view.

By not seeing colour you are not seeing or celebrating the difference, and you are not seeing the hidden racism. As white people we have the privileges that are commonplace to us, that we can simply

We still have to confront our own privilege, but with the added challenge of staying true to our own political framework.

assume, and thus we often do not realise just how privileged we are. We can often walk away from situations that people from different ethnic groups cannot.

Tolerance

This is a liberal concept, often readily accepted in anarchist circles without question. It was made famous through Voltaire's (misattributed) quote - "I do not agree with what you say, but I'll defend to the death your right to say it" - now taken as dogma in liberal-left quarters. I would argue that it is not actually anarchist. There are many things we do not tolerate – fascist street stalls for instance. However, to tolerate means that you acknowledge that someone is different and though you are not happy with that difference you are able co-exist in some way. It is not acceptance.2

It is this recognition of the problems with tolerance that underlies critiques of multiculturalism as an approach to culturally diverse societies3. This is a place where anarchist thought has a strength that other ideologies do not. There is scope in it for accepting diversity, for acknowledging difference as a good thing, not to be feared, without having to accept all aspects unconditionally. However, we have to be both more explicit and more nuanced in how we approach it. As well as challenging society as a whole, it includes:

(a) developing positions that recognise the oppression on a practical level in our own particular cultures; and

(b) finding ways to show grassroots solidarity that do not repeat patterns of privilege to the detriment of the groups we want to support in their struggles.

But what about...

Finally, we need to be alert to a fear or 'detour' that often comes up in privileged groups, that of

pointing to other groups and saying how much worse they are on some other issue of discrimination. Though a natural response, that does not make it right. It is a divide and rule game allowing us to ignore what is before us while playing to dominant fears that are being used by politicians with aims we are opposed to.

This is not to deny that there are issues, but that we should make sure our own house is in order first before imposing our will on another culture. In many cases it is possible to find organisations from within those cultures, often at great risk, who have a nuanced, considered view of how to integrate the competing demands, which do not play into narratives of hate. Thus, rather than attacking an entire culture and dictating how they should behave, we can find places to show practical solidarity in line with our own politics and challenge racists subtexts with our own communities.

Conclusion

This has only been a brief overview of the topic, touching lightly on many of the problems around forming an effective anti-racist politics. In a subsequent article I look at more practical examples

of cultural racism, particularly around notions of land using Northern Ireland and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict to unpick some of the deeper assumptions.

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Some Resources

Note: many of the following resources are based on the situation in the US. Each country / culture has its own contexts and ways in which oppression is imposed and experienced, so much will not necessarily translate directly across to Ireland. However, many of the underlying messages do.

Key Texts

Anti-Racist Social Work, Lena Dominelli.

Rethinking Multiculturalism, Bhikhu Parekh.

Paul Kivel: http://www.paulkivel.com

Resist Racism: http://resistracism.wordpress.com/racism-101/

People of Colour Organize – hard hitting texts challenging problems in white anti-racism: http://www.peopleofcolororganize.com/category/analysis

Colours of Resistance, anarchist analyses of anti-racism: http://www.coloursofresistance.org/

Racial Equality Tools: http://www.racialequity-tools.org

Allies for Change: http://alliesforchange.org/

Articles & Blogs

Race Revolt – a zine on race politics by feminists and queers: http://www.racerevolt.org.uk

Text of a 1994 talk on Racism (WSM): http://struggle.ws/talks/racism.html

Anarchism, Racism & Class Struggle (WSM): http://struggle.ws/rbr/rbr4_racism.html

Detour-Spotting for white anti-racists, Joan Olsson: http://www.racialequitytools.org/resource-files/olson.pdf

Checklist for Allies Against Racism, John Raible: http://johnraible.wordpress.com

Tiffany, Friend of People of Colour, Audrey Thompson: http://www.pauahtun.org/Tiffany.web.html

So you think you are an anti-racist?, Paul Gorski & Multicultural Pavilion: http://www.edchange.org/multicultural/resources/paradigmshifts_race.html

I don't see colour, I just see a human being, Abagond: http://abagond.wordpress.com/2011/12/01/i-dont-see-colour-i-just-see-a-human-being/

New Code of Ethics for Anti-Racist White Allies, JLove & Tim Wise: http://jlove.mvmt.com/2012/01/28/new-code-of-ethics-for-anti-racist-white-allies-by-jlove-tim-wise/

Ten Things to Remember: Anti-Racist Strategies for White Students, Chris Dixon: http://www.soaw.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=491

Beyond the Whiteness: Global Capitalism and White Supremacy: thoughts on movement building and anti-racist organizing, Chris Crass: http://www.kersplebedeb.com/mystuff/books/collective-liberation/beyond.html

A few good reasons why white people should not wear 'Mohawks' or dreadlocks, C.K. Donovan & Q-L. Driskill: http://zinelibrary.info/files/dreads.pdf

Ronit Lentin, Israeli-Irish blogger on racism: http://www.ronitlentin.net/

The Katrina Reader, articles on anti-racism in the context of solidarity following Hurricane Katrina: http://katrinareader.org/toc/617

Organisations

Residents Against Racism: http://www.residents-againstracism.org/

European Network Against Racism Ireland: http://enarireland.org

Irish Travellers Network: http://www.itmtrav.ie

Traveller Solidarity Network: http://travellersolidarity.org

Collective Liberation: http://collectiveliberation.org/

1 http://www.humanrights.ie/index.php/2009/11/16/ronit-lentin-anti-racism-and-lived-experience/

2 For good arguments about tolerance see, for example, Slavoj Žižek's Living in End Times.

3 Excellently spelled out in Bhikhu Parekh's Rethinking Multiculturalism.

Do workers' co-operatives help or hinder the building of a libertarian communist society?

Workers' co-operatives have always been championed by sections of the left and wider labour movement - from their advocacy by 19th century Welsh social reformer and utopian socialist Robert Owens to Proudhon through to their existence in various state capitalist countries today such as Cuba.
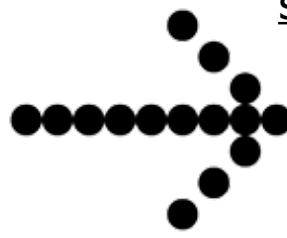
WORDS :
SEAN MATTHEWS

While workers' co-operatives can provide a small example of anarchist ideas based on self-management, direct democracy and mutual aid in action, we should not be blinded by their contradictions and should query their effectiveness as a strategy for real revolutionary transformation.

Support for workers' co-operatives has always been a long standing feature of anarchism both as theory and in revolutionary practice since its emergence within the workers' movement.   Anarchists have always stressed the importance of building and supporting schools of struggle and education such as modern schools, 'social centres' and workers' societies - a vibrant public sphere, a kind of counter-spectacle with its own values, ideas, organisations and practices, or, in Gramscian terms, a counter-hegemonic project challenging the dominant ideology of the ruling class. This would be seen as complementing and in tandem with building a wider revolutionary movement that aims to abolish capitalist exploitative relationships and domination.

In short co-operatives can be a 'germ of the future' and can provide a glimpse of what type of social organisations anarchists favour. As Bakunin argued, "the co-operative system. . . carries within it the germ of the future economic order."[1]

What are co-operatives?

There are many different types of co-operatives - from housing co-ops to credit unions and a more business-based model such as the co-operative supermarket which has stores across Ireland. In the North the sector has over £2 million in assets and up to 350,000 members, providing employment to perhaps 4,500 people. On a global level the sector employs nearly 1 billion people while 3 billion people secure their livelihood through them.

In theory co-operatives are based on one worker, one vote. In other words those who do the work manage the workplace within which they do it (i.e. they are based on workers' self-management in some form). In addition, they are an example of working class self-help and self-activity. Instead of relying on others to provide work, co-operatives show that production can be carried on without the existence of a class of masters employing a class of order takers.

Numbers

There has been a dramatic increase in the number of producer co-operatives in most Western countries in recent years. Italian co-operatives now number well over 20,000, many of them large and having many support structures as well

(which aids their development by reducing their isolation and providing long term financial support lacking within the capitalist market).

The Basque country is home to the world's largest worker co-operative, the Mondragon group, which is effectively a multi-national corporation employing more than 80,000 people across 256 companies including a university and has expanded into 18 countries. The company has bounced back from the recession producing a €240 million profit last year and to become an owner worker you have to invest €20,000. While the senior manager's pay is capped at 9 times the salary of the lowest paid worker, the fact that the world's largest co-operative model has become fully integrated within the capitalist system becoming a form of state sponsored self-managed exploitation highlights its limitations as a sustainable revolutionary alternative.

Challenging capitalism?

As Joseph Kay a regular contributor to the popular libcom blog remarked 'Workers' co-ops are often seen as hotbeds of radical, anti-capitalist thought. Images of hippies, earnest vegetarians or executives in blue overalls could not, however, be further from reality.'

Indeed far from challenging capitalism, many workers' co-operatives are actually an important sector of modern economies on the basis of promoting a more 'ethical capitalism.' Workers' co-operatives may provide a catalyst for change and glimpse of what is possible but their gradual and reformist nature must be resisted as not only futile but an abstraction from the important battles that need to be waged in our workplaces and communities . In the case of Israel, for example, the co-operative movement formed the backbone of the early Zionist project of colonial expansionism and military occupation.

Yugoslavia under the leadership of Marshal Tito broke with Soviet style state capitalism in 1949 introducing a more 'decentralised' version of 'workers' self-management' with the state as the guarantor. Rather than providing real workers' control of production and direct democracy, Tito's reforms provided an illusion and smokescreen for his iron grip on power. This contradiction was exposed in the 1970s following neo-liberal restructuring resulting in mass unemployment, massive international debt, declining real wages, triple digit inflation and ethnic conflict becoming rife.

Like Cuba, the Venezuelan government has also appropriated and expanded the co-operative sector. Writing in the latest edition of the Spark (the magazine of ICTU Youth) Stephen Nolan points out, 'In 1998 there were 800 cooperatives ….in 2006 there were 100,000 involving 1.5 million citizens operating under either state, co-operative or mixed ownership.'

However, the reality between fact and fiction in terms of lip service to 'participatory' democracy and incompatibility between the state and genuine self-management is revealed in an article by Shawn Hattingh of the South African Zabalaza Anarchist Communist Front: 'Far from being havens that are nurturing worker self-management, state-owned enterprises in Venezuela are marked by relations of domination, oppression and exploitation. The state has even, at times, tried to undermine the ability of workers to challenge bad working conditions and poor wages. It, consequently, matters little whether the state or a capitalist owns a factory, workers still do not have power or direct democracy in the workplace. 'Co-management' and other state schemes have often become a way for the state to exploit workers even further, including pushing through aspects of lean production, casualisation and outsourcing. Such relations and practices are not marginal matters. In a society where there is a hierarchical and oppressive pattern in the relations of production, genuine socialism does not and cannot exist. Oppressive relations of production are a common denominator in all class based societies, including Venezuela.'[2]

Workers' democracy?

Workers' co-operatives depend on wider market forces to survive and grow and cannot exist outside of capitalist social relations due to the pressures of market forces and competition. Like private enterprises, co-operatives are also subject to the same pressures such as layoffs, price rises and reduction in wages in the process reducing any resemblance of 'workers' democracy.'

In examining the question of co-operatives, it is worth noting Mikhail Bakunin (1814-1876) who argued that:

"The various forms of co-operation are incontestably one of the most equitable and rational ways of organizing the future system of production. But before it can realize its aim of emancipating the labouring masses so that they will receive the full product of their labour, the land and all forms of capital must be converted into collective property. As long as this is not accomplished, the cooperatives will be overwhelmed by the all-powerful competition of monopoly capital and vast landed property; … and even in the unlikely event that a small group of cooperatives should somehow surmount the competition, their success would only beget a new class of prosperous co-operators in the midst of a poverty-stricken mass of proletarians".

Using his observation and study of the co-operative movement in post-apartheid South Africa, Oliver Nathan, from the Zabalaza Anarchist Communist Front pointed out the dilemma between the ideals of the co-operative and the market realities of the day, 'Most co-operatives then have faced high levels of degeneration from their initial goals, those of market success-paying their membership a living wage - and internal democracy. Worker co-operatives in the post-apartheid dispensation should be understood to be survivalist in that they are often only able to pay their members a marginal wage at irregular intervals, due to their often marginal presence in the market. Members often have to find alternative sources of employment or rely on family and community networks to support them.' [3]

The role of social centres

Although mutually exclusive, workers' co-operatives and social centres are often part of the same political furniture sharing the same space and project. For example Na Criosbhealí café in Belfast takes its inspiration from the popular Youth Houses in the Basque country and grew out of Belfast youth assembly.

Aiming 'to politicise, educate, and self-empower the people of Belfast and Ireland so that they are not held hostage by the arms of capitalism and right wing thought. The Co-Op organises events which try to enhance culture, political thought,

awareness and to raise money for certain causes or other events. We see the space as social and open to all comrades who would like to take advantage of it. We have had different political groups, Unions and other organisations organise events and fundraisers. The space has held film showings, AGM's and language classes, we aim to improve these events and also to organise a library and other educational aspects with a future view of having a functioning outreach section of the Co-Operative.'[4]

While Na Criosbhealí provides a positive space to organise and agitate, it remains unclear whether it can replicate the success and influence of the Basque and wider Iberian model. Especially given the contrast in political and social circumstances in relation to the lack of a social movement here and the confusion of 'progressive left-wing politics' with everything from Leninism to Stalinism.

While it is essential to retain an internationalist perspective, the fetishment for every 'anti-imperialist' struggle under the sun should not be at the expense of building links and solidarity with workers and communities here across the sectarian divide.

On the other hand the Just Books Collective have more of an established presence in Belfast stretching back to the opening of the original shop in Winetavern Street (located deliberately between the bottom of the Falls and Shankill), by the Belfast Anarchist Collective, in June 1978 without any state subsidy. While the shop closed in 1994 it still continues to provide stalls at events and in the future aims to establish a working class resource and solidarity centre including a centre for community and labour education. Now a worker co-operative run on a self-managed basis it is currently piloting a labour and education project - Just Learning - in communities across Belfast believing it is important to promote alternatives based on mutual aid, class politics, self-help and co-operation.

The social centre concept has taken root most successfully in Italy, beginning in the 1970s. Large factories and even abandoned military barracks have been "appropriated" for use as social centres. There are today dozens of social centres in Italy and worryingly several fascist social centres have emerged such as Casa Pound.

Social centres have taken different political and cultural dimensions including both squatted and rented, and are located in most European cities and all corners of the globe. I have visited social centres in Barcelona, Israel, New Zealand, Australia, Greece, Basque Country to name a few providing me with a degree of knowledge and experience.

In Ireland, apart from the Warzone centre and Na Criosbhealí in Belfast there is the Seomra Spraoi autonomous social space in Dublin which hosts WSM offices and Solidarity Books in Cork.

Basque Country

After the death of Franco in the late 1970s, there was an explosion in social radicalism and youth rebellion in the Basque country. Squats, free radios and youth assemblies resulted in the formation of Youth Houses (Gaztetxeak) and provided an expression of this struggle for change through building a Basque political culture combining an anti-authoritarian radicalism with values of self-organisation and self-management. According to Eoin O'Broin who has written extensively on Basque youth movements, 'Despite great energy on the part of the state to crush this movement, twenty years on it survives, stronger and more sophisticated than ever.'[5]

The emergence of social centres in the late 1970s can be linked to the political/social circumstances of the era and the potential for revolutionary change. Social centres can be rooted to an even earlier period of workers' and union clubs which spread across Europe at the turn of the 20th century providing a pivotal role and function within the emerging militant workers' movement.

The formation of ateneu (athenaeum) in Barcelona during this period added to the growing grassroots social infrastructure, comprising the influential anarchist union of the CNT (National Federation of Labour), newspapers, cultural associations and social clubs moulding a working class culture built on mutual aid and direct action in just one example of this process. These popular cultural and social centres increased in number to 75 by 1914 and provided a genuine need for workers in their locality in terms of social agitation. Each ateneu offered

a range of services and leisure including talks, library and education; providing tuition in writing and grammar schools, conveying a culture of action and mobilisation rather than reliance on local authorities.

Conclusion

To some extent today's social centres mark a departure from this radical labour tradition in terms of their composition, locality and outlook. These new social centres often come across as insular 'activist ghettos', divorced from the concrete needs and experiences of the class, becoming divorced from the essence of social centres which should be about providing an open and accessible space and a forum for education and agitation.

While Ireland is yet to develop the same dynamic and level of a co-operative movement as their counterparts in the rest of the world, it is important that we reflect and analyse this avenue before we embark along this path. Workers' co-operatives do play a useful function in highlighting the possibility of workers' co-operation without bosses, providing a forum for debate and a temporary relief from unemployment but this does not mean we should be blind to their ultimate futility in challenging the capitalist system. The building of a workers' co-operative movement cannot be a substitute for a revolutionary strategy based on collective working class action and the ultimate expropriation of the power and wealth of the capitalist class.

Where we realise our own class power, we can finally take control of our lives, our communities and workplaces free from exploitation, alienation and oppression, based on the principles of libertarian communism. We cannot self-manage capitalism in our own interests as it is automatically weighted against workers. The only way we can really live without exploitation and bosses is not by internalising them but by abolishing capitalism and its protector the state. In the North and across Ireland this means working within the workers' movement and community struggles, building an infrastructure of social centres, cultural associations and propaganda outlets arming ourselves with the rich traditions of class struggle anarchism; with a revolutionary class struggle libertarian movement that will bury the politics of the past and build the politics of the living.

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[1] The Philosophy of Bakunin, p. 385

[2] http://www.anarkismo.net/article/22640

[3] http://libcom.org/library/worker-co-operatives-markets-south-african-state

[4] http://www.wsm.ie/c/belfast-interview-croisbhealai-workers-co-operative

[5] Matxinada: Basque Nationalism & Radical Basque Youth Movements

Revolutionary Organization in the age of Networked Individualism

The revolutions and revolts that swept the world in 2011 took almost everyone by surprise.
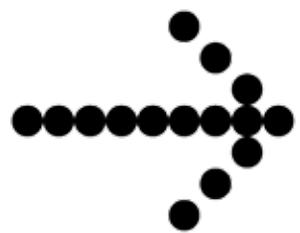
WORDS :
ANDREW FLOOD

More Information

Based on a much longer review of Paul Mason's 'Why It's Kicking Off Everywhere' that can be read at http://www.wsm.ie/c/kicking-2011-revolts-age-networked-individual

One of the first strong attempts to explain why they happened is Paul Mason's 'Why It's Kicking Off Everywhere.' He argues that "the materialist explanation for 2011...is as much about individuals versus hierarchies as it is about rich against poor." By far the most provocative element of his book is the idea that communications technology, in particular the internet, is transforming the way people behave and that a significant contribution to the revolts of 2011 lie in these changes. If he's right it had profound consequences for the form and structure of revolutionary organisations including anarchist ones.

In Mason's book these new people are the Networked Individuals. One critic of the concept Barry Wellman provides this useful summary of what he terms Networked Individualism. He says it is "the move from densely-knit and tightly-bounded groups to sparsely-knit and loosely-bounded networks. Each person is a switchboard, between ties and networks. People remain connected, but as individuals, rather than being rooted in the home bases of work unit and household. Each person operates a separate personal community network, and switches rapidly among multiple subnetworks.. the organic and multi-dimensional relationships of communities are being transformed into narrow digitally-enabled, highly individualized, networked relationships; perhaps most widely recognizable as Facebook "friend"-ings accompanied by Facebook "like"-ings as a possible substitute for shared community values and norms." http://jcmc.indiana.edu/vol8/issue3/wellman.html

Mason uses sociologist Richard Sennett's conception of the networked individual as one with "weak ties, multiple loyalties and greater autonomy." Mason shows how the individual freedoms that were won in the period from the late 1960's were not, as many think, a unique step forward in history. In terms of such freedoms we are not in fact always moving forward making gains; gains won can, and have been, rolled back by reaction -- sometimes slowly and sometimes in jumps. He references the period before World War One and its "zeitgeist of globalized trade, technological progress and sexual liberation... followed by a century of economic crisis, militarism, genocide and totalitarian rule."

Referring to the movement of the 60's and the 1962 Port Huron statement in particular, he rejects the idea that the break with collectivism that statement represented was "the doomed precursor of neoliberalism" and instead argues that it failed because it was premature. Premature because technology was not developed enough to allow freedom for the majority and premature because "the forces of collectivism, nationalism and corporate power were, at that point, stronger than the forces fighting against them."

The Network effect

At the heart of the concept of the Networked Individual is the Network Effect. Basically the more people that use a network the more useful it is. If you were the first person in the world with a phone, it would have been of no use. When two people had a phone it would still have been of very limited use to either of them. The more people had phones the more useful they became to each individual with a phone. They

become most useful to everyone in the phone network when everybody not only has a phone but has it on them at all times. One statistic stood out for me in the entire book: "Facebook put on six-sevenths of its user base in the three years after Lehman Brothers went bust." In terms of the Network Effect this means we should have expected a massive increase in Facebook's influence in that time, far more that the 600% growth alone would suggest.

That 'network effect' is the reason so many of us are stuck using Facebook even though we dislike its corporate greed, unethical methods and use by the police and other state forces as a surveillance tool. Almost all of us make the judgment that these disadvantages, all of which are significant, are outweighed by the advantage of not only being able to reach out to hundreds of similar activists, but also thousands or even hundreds of thousands of random folk. There are attempts to set up alternative activist social network sites, but very few of us use them because the only people there are a rather small minority of other activists.

The transformation of people

The argument Mason makes is not trivial: these communications technologies are transforming people. In the book he launches into a description of how the transformation of people who play multi-user online computer games affects real world interactions: "a woman tweeting at work or from the front line of a demonstration is experiencing the same shared consciousness, role-play, multifaceted personality and intense bonding that you get in World of Warcraft." He follows up a listing of tweets (about Libya) that he received over ten minutes with the comment that this "beats any ten minutes of Counter-Strike ever played."

Later in the same chapter he returns to the theme, saying "observers of the early factory system described how, within a generation, it had wrought a total change in the behavior, thinking, body shapes and lee expectancy of those imprisoned within it. People grew smaller, their limbs became bent; physical movements became more regimented. Family

units broke down. Why should a revolution in knowledge and technology not be producing an equally frantic - albeit diametrically opposite - change in human behavior?"

The use of social networks substitutes for the strong ties that used to exist amongst workers when we all left the same streets every morning to work in the same factories or down the same mine. Under such conditions the social pressure to stand by your fellow workers and act collectively was enormous, but your connections seldom extended far from that pit village or industrial district. You were dependent on the union or party leadership for coordination and information from afar. The ties generated by networks may be very much weaker; they require very little commitment but they also have a very much greater reach.

The orthodox left tends to bemoan and wish for a return to those earlier days when mass labour intensive factories concentrated and disciplined thousands of workers in the way that both Leninist parties and many unions found useful. It's no coincidence that leftist terminology from that period is riddled with military terms and analogies -- the working class was literally an army that was ordered into battle. Left to one side in that longing for the old days is that while these methods might have looked efficient on paper, in historical reality they were a disaster. The imposed centralized discipline created the mechanism by which small, well meaning or otherwise, minorities could impose an increasingly brutal discipline to ensure that what the party considered the correct course was taken. Stalin's gulags could not have existed without the centralized discipline required to command millions to both enter and operate that system. In 1956 at the British Communist Party's conference those few who tried to raise the Russian invasion of Hungary were drowned out by mass chants of 'discipline, discipline'

The role of the revolutionary organisation in the networked age

If the central thesis of the book is correct, that is that the advent of mass one to many communication in the form of the internet is transforming both production and the way people behave then there is a strong argument to radically re-examine everything we understand by revolutionary organisation. This after all is a very, very different situation than that faced by any previous generation of revolutionaries for whom mass communication was non-existent unless you had built the mass organisation that could produce finance, and distribute a daily paper.

What is our model

The current model of revolutionary organisation for all of the far left and most of the anarchist movement draws on organisational models that are derived from the organisations built under the old factory system. That is they are based on strong ties between people and a relatively high level of discipline, either self or collectively agreed in the case of anarchism or imposed from above in the case of the various types of Leninism. Anarchist organisations tended to allow considerably more autonomy to local sections but they were still largely expected to stay within the confines set by the decisions of regular conferences and statements of aims and principles. They certainly are not based on "weak ties and multiple loyalties" -- indeed many anarchist organisations would rule out being a member of other anarchist organisations.

The point here is not that the new tendency towards "weak ties, multiple loyalties and greater autonomy" makes it impossible to construct such organisations. Clearly they continue to exist and recruit. As is the case for unions, which are organised on the same basic lines but limit themselves to the economic sphere of struggle. The point is that perhaps it is no longer possible to imagine these organisations building into the sort of mass forms that would be needed to co-ordinate revolution as once happened in Russia in 1917 or Spain in 1936.

We are also at least a decade into a process where it has become apparent that attempts to impose that old model of organisation on the emerging movement have shown very little success and in many cases have done considerable damage. There is little to be gained from a debate over whether these changes are good, bad or indifferent for revolutionaries, the point is that have and are happening. We either find new ways of organising around "weak ties, multiple loyalties and greater autonomy" or we retire to the sidelines to comment, archive and hold the occasional meeting about the Spanish revolution.

Giving full consideration to this question is the task of another article (or indeed a shelf of books and decades of experimentation) but what can be said is that we are talking here not of a theory but of an emerging process that can already be observed and learned from. One that is over a decade old. From Zapatista solidarity to the Seattle WTO protest through to Tahir, Real Democracy & Occupy the methods of the old left have not been to the forefront of emerging moments of struggle. Instead we have seen the development of a largely new set of structures and methodologies that do indeed reflect the "weak ties, multiple loyalties and greater autonomy" of those drawn into involvement.

Where the terrain has been such that the advantages of the left organisations in terms of the concentration of resources has put them in the driving seat the result has often been ugly and disempowering. The old left controlled the anti-war movement at the time of the 2003 invasion of Iraq and was unable to

do anything to slow or halt the drive to war despite the mass opposition. The old left, if we understand it to include the union leaderships, controlled the mass union marches and token strike of 2008-2010 and were unable to halt or even slow the drive to austerity. In both cases the price of failure included massive levels of demoralization that made many less willing to engage in future activity even if it also resulted in an angry minority.

Just about the only terrain the old left has advanced on in Ireland is the electoral one. This perhaps not only because the crisis has made anti-capitalist politics popular but more fundamentally because the crisis of organisation arising from this new age of "weak ties, multiple loyalties and greater autonomy" is destroying the traditional organisations of the political party system of the right at as great if not greater a rate than it has destroyed those of the left. The meteoric rise of the Tea Party network over the more traditional Republicans in the Republican Party in the US being one example. The electoral gains of the left are of course also on a terrain that is best suited to "weak ties, multiple loyalties and greater autonomy". Taking 3 minutes to vote for someone every 5 years as a very weak commitment. This is why while tens or hundreds of thousands voted for the radical left at the election, the next demonstrations called by the same organisations attracted only hundreds.

In the last couple of years many on the left, including the WSM have started to try to shift their organisational structures and engagement models from the traditional forms to new forms. In Ireland initiatives like 'Claiming Our Future' are very obviously based on trying to find ways to work with a large network of people with "weak ties, multiple loyalties and greater autonomy" rather than try and recruit them into a single organization. There is probably a very interesting question around just how conscious such organisations are that they are attempting a fundamental transformation and how much it is simply a reaction to the changing world around us and in particular the new technologies that are available.

Lessons from the summit protests

My experiences in the early summit protest movement led me to sit down and write a relatively detailed discussion of the emerging networks and the role of technology in revolutionary politics back in 2004, published as 'Summit Protests & Networks.' http://www.wsm.ie/c/summit-protests-network-organisation-anarchism The argument I made back in 2004 was that while some "see the two organisational methods as in competition with each other. This need not be so, in fact for anarchists both forms should be complementary as the strengths of one are the weaknesses of the other and vice versa. The rapid growth of the movement has strongly favoured the network form, it's now time to look at also building its more coherent partner. That is to build specific anarchist organisations that will work in and with the networks as they emerge."

This was perhaps an acceptable fudge but one that avoids rather than answers the central issue. There are models of revolutionary organisation that would be based on a very small revolutionary cadre influencing much larger mass movements but experience has indicated that even in the internet age it is hard for a small group to ramp up mass influence fast enough in a crisis. Previously I've argued that at an absolute minimum a revolutionary organisation should aim to recruit one person in 1,000 into its ranks, around 6,000 as a target for the island of Ireland. Our experience of the early days of the crisis is that the small numbers that the left had in the unions meant that although arguments could and

were won in union branches where there were active leftists this was a tiny minority of branches so the argument was lost overall. At least at that point in time internet reach did not compensate for a lack of people on the ground to make the arguments.

I think this rough maths still applies but what does make sense is to recognize that the costs of maintaining a large loose periphery in terms of both time and money are magnitudes less than they used to be because of the new technology. Up to now it simply wasn't possible never mind worthwhile for a small number of volunteers to maintain contact with large number of individuals with "weak ties, multiple loyalties and greater autonomy." When my political involvement started that could only be done though addressing envelopes and licking stamps, something that very quickly became too expensive and time consuming.

Coherent organisations in networks

There is a political issue here as well though. When you have a coherent organisation intersecting a network it will have an influence on that network a magnitude or two greater than the number of members it has should allow. The internal dynamics of a coherent organisation will mean that its members will be immersed in a culture of regular political discussion and education and will almost certainly have discussed issues in outline long before they appear in the network at a formal level. They will also have faster, more reliable and more trust worthy contact through their coherent organization with members in other cities than almost anyone in the network will have.

That sort of formal intervention is mirrored by the similar abilities that the informal leaders that arise within networks will have. Both can only be guarded against through good process, awareness of such potential threats and a practice of challenging them and defusing them as they arise. But while the experience of doing so can be an informal one, based around people with experience and who are not inclined to abuse that to become the informal leadership themselves, at least in the early stages of networks appearing and expanding, such skills will be few and far between.

Part of the role of the revolutionary organisation has to be then to build the needed skills within the network to identify and diffuse such problems as they arise. It can also carry over these skills from one network to another in both time and space as its activists accumulate knowledge and experience.

### Do we still need to build the revolutionary organisation

What about building the organisation itself. Does this new 'networked individual' and the ease of one to many internet communications mean that the size of a revolutionary organisation no longer matters. That the three men and a dog organisation 'with the right ideas' are as important as an organisation of thousands?

I think size still matters when it comes to organising in real world meetings but I do think the new technology changes the way a coherent organization should operate. It now makes sense to see our work in network forms of organisation as also being a way of accumulating engagement over time with a very large number of people most of whom will never join a coherent revolutionary organisation in normal circumstances. To use the WSM as an example the 7,200 people currently following us via Facebook would have been impossible to find never mind retain contact with 20 years ago, As of now every one of them has the potential to see a link to each new article published on our site and

to not only thus read it but also recommend it to their friends. Doing this via the postal system would have cost in the region of 3,000 euro and dozens of hours stuffing envelopes.

In the past these realities necessitated that volunteer based revolutionary organisations had what has been called an 'engagement cliff' between a very dedicated hardworking membership and the broad mass of the population. Leninist parties tried to get around this through ploughing a lot of resources into having their leadership as paid full timers. This gave them greater resources to maintain contact with a larger periphery but in doing so created very ossified organisations that magnified the problems inherent in centralized top down parties as that core group monopolized communications within the organisation and between the organisation and its periphery.

In any case the revolutionary anarchist organisation can never be more than a guiding light. Unlike Leninists we do not aim to be the physical leadership of the revolution, we do not seek to put our organisation in power. The anarchist concept of instead being a 'leadership of ideas' ties rather well into a movement composed of people with "weak ties, multiple loyalties and greater autonomy" because it addresses the weak spots of such a movement without being in opposition to its fundamental characteristic of both individual and collective autonomy. In such a system the coherent anarchist organisation aims to be a scaffold along which many of the major nodes of a network can rapidly grow and link up as they are needed, a scaffold that gets reconfigured and hopefully increases its effectiveness with each new round of struggle.

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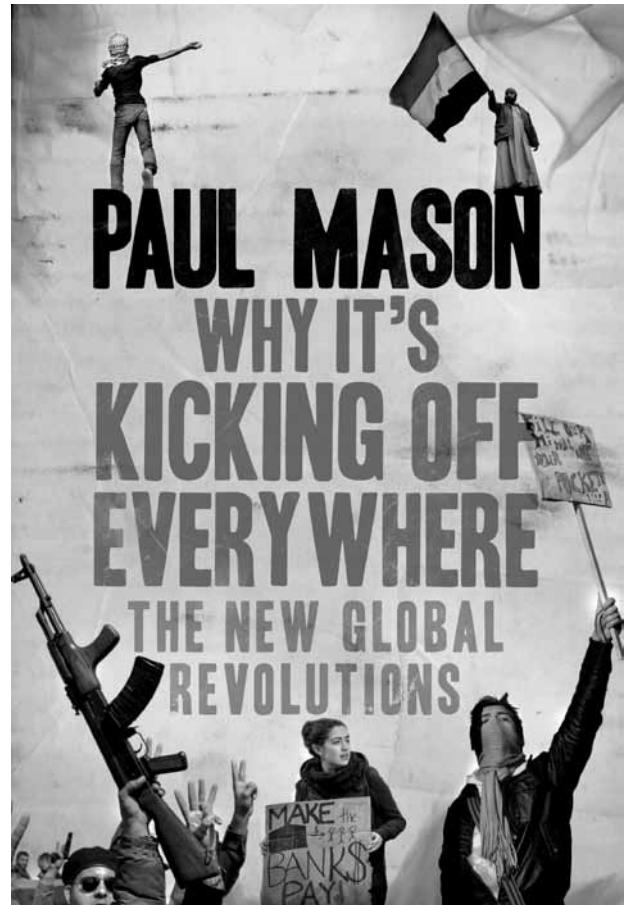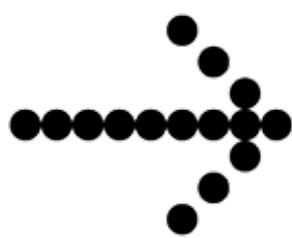
THE CRISES OF MULTI-CULTURAL-ISM: RACISM IN A NEOLIBERAL AGE

REVIEWED BY AIDAN ROWE

In November 2011, the Fine Gael mayor of Naas, Darren Scully sparked controversy when he announced on national radio that he would no longer represent "Black Africans", due to their "aggressiveness and bad manners" and their tendency to "play the race card". Ultimately, the controversy caused by Scully's blatant and unambiguous racism forced his resignation as mayor.

However, as Crises… co-author Gavan Titley pointed out, the mistake, from Scully's point of view, was not in being racist per se, but rather that he "played the wrong race card"1. While overt racism is still experienced by people of colour both on the streets and within institutions, in public discourse the language and tactics of racism have become more subtle (to some extent, in response to significant victories by anti-racist, anti-apartheid and post-colonial movements worldwide, and the demise of scientific racism as an ideology). Racist speech is no longer concerned (explicitly at least) with racial superiority and inferiority, or even with race per se, but rather with the supposed impossibility of the harmonious co-existence of different cultures within a single society. Scully's blunder was his lack of political sophistication, not his racist intent.

Multiculturalism itself is exposed as an effort to depoliticise racism, rendering invisible structures of racialised power through constructing an imagined post-racial landscape.

Multiculturalism in crisis

In Crises…, Lentin and Titley discuss similar themes, exploring the dynamics of racism in contemporary public discourse in the era of neoliberalism. Specifically, they discuss various narratives around 'the failed experiment of multiculturalism', which function as a means of 'laundering' racist ideas and policies. These narratives have a fairly familiar form: For the past number of years we have been living in the era of multiculturalism, whose noble aspirations were pursued by state institutions across the Western world. However, despite the good intentions of its left and liberal proponents, multiculturalism has proved to be an utter failure and must be abandoned.

These narratives, while often presented by their narrators as someone finally speaking up on behalf of the silent majority in the face of repressive political correctness, in fact crop up regularly in public discourse, with everyone from newspaper columnists to mainstream political figures such as David Cameron, Nicolas Sarkozy and Angela Merkel, to far-right figures such as Nick Griffin or Geert Wilders clamouring to sound the death knell for multiculturalism.

Crises… challenges those narratives, by questioning whether a coherent multicultural era ever existed. They argue that multiculturalism was never seriously embraced by the establishment beyond the rhetorical, nor by left anti-racists, who saw it as a liberal retreat into culture (but who have been forced somewhat reluctantly into the position of defending multiculturalism against attacks from the right). Instead, the spectre of multiculturalism is erected as a target for the racial anxieties of everyone from liberals to the far-right.

This thesis is elucidated by combining theoretical analysis with discussion of various recent controversies: moves to ban or regulate the wearing of Islamic headscarves or burkas by Muslim women, the Swiss ban on minarets, the 'free speech' controversy around the Jyllands Posten cartoons, the 2004 Citizenship Referendum in Ireland, and others.

Free speech and white privilege

Of particular practical significance for the Irish left, specifically those involved in anti-fascist organising, is the discussion of the Jyllands Posten cartoon controversy, which has a number of parallels with the free speech debates that regularly result when fascist leaders are invited to speak on university campuses.2 In such controversies, the substantive issue at stake (in this case the racist content of cartoons of Muhammed in a newspaper with a right-wing anti-Islamic agenda and historical links to fascism) is subsumed into a meta-debate about the principle of free-speech and its limits. This reflexive reframing of the issue serves a particular political function: to apparently invert the power structures of a white-privileged society so that the white racist becomes the victim of oppressive multiculturalism – an ontological inversion that functions to delegitimate the complaints of the oppressed and cast the oppressor as a symbol of Western liberal values.

"Organised around this abstraction is a 'threefold cast of characters' beginning with the protagonist who breaks a taboo in pursuit of freedom, who is subsequently supported by principled defenders of the open society, and both of whom triangulate with the subject who has taken offence... Muslims are cast as this intolerant apex, and thus

The Crises of Multiculturalism
Racism in a Neoliberal Age
Alana Lentin and Gavan Titley
With a preface by Gary Younge

positioned, 'end up being treated as deficient in comparison with the evident open-mindedness of those who tolerate transgression'".3

A similar dynamic exists in the case of fascist speakers on university campuses, with anti-fascists being drawn into a liberal-idealist discussion about what rights exist, how far they extend, and which rights take precedence when they conflict – a discussion which ultimately benefits fascists and racists. The more materialist analysis found here of how such events and the controversy surrounding them actually impacts the subjects of racism is perhaps a more useful way to frame discussions around applying a No Platform For Fascists policy.

Liberal racism, feminism vs. Islam, homonationalism

Also of interest is the authors' exposition of the various forms of racism embedded in liberal approaches to understanding race and to governance, which are significantly more subtle than those of the right and far-right. Multiculturalism itself is exposed as an effort to depoliticise racism, rendering invisible structures of racialised power through constructing an imagined post-racial landscape, and in doing so functioning both as an adjunct to the post-politicism of neoliberalism generally and as a liberal mirror to the far-right's shift in focus from race to culture. This post-racialism deprives racialised groups of the right to challenge discrimination as they experience it. Multicultural diversity is exposed as a coded language for certain acceptable ways of performing minority cultures – good diversity - which is counterposed with kinds of cultural performance less palatable to the white majority – bad diversity.

The co-optation of feminist and queer struggles by racist agendas is also discussed in-depth. Contemporary racism often employs the language and concerns of feminist and queer struggles in order to position Muslims and other racialised groups as a threat to the gains made by these movements, even though many of these gains

Contemporary rac— ism often employs the language and concerns of feminist and queer struggles in order to position Muslims and other racialised groups as a threat to the gains made by these movements.

are recent and heavily contested within even the most progressive of Western societies. This was a particularly significant dynamic in debates about Islamic headscarves and veils across Europe, where veiled Muslim women were presented as a threat to the position of all women within European societies. The actual views and experiences of veiled women were in practice excluded from these debates, which were more concerned with white people's particular racialised vision of what a free woman looks like. The authors draw from Jasbir Puar's work on 'homonationalism' in discussing the use of queer issues towards racist agendas. Queers, particularly those who fall into the category of 'homonormative' (those that closely mirror heteronormative sexuality and heterosexual identity: upholding monogamy, binary gender etc.), are able to "enact [previously barred] forms of national, racial or other belongings by contributing to a collective vilification of Muslims".4 This dynamic is particularly significant in relation to the struggle for Palestinian national liberation, as Israel uses its relatively progressive position on LGBT rights to project itself as the ally of Western queer people in a region dominated by homophobic Muslim states and thus help to justify (pinkwash) its continued oppression of Palestine.

Conclusion

As an academic text, rather than an anti-racist handbook for activists, Crises… is somewhat lacking in direct practical insights for anti-racist activists, and often requires significant effort to parse the analyses presented into a useful form (a problem that is compounded by the dense writing style of the authors). However, a sophisticated understanding of how racism works under

neoliberal governance is key if we are to win the 'battle of ideas' against those who would use racism to divide and control us in the interests of the ruling class. As such, the depth and incisiveness of analysis in Crises…make it an important text both for those seeking a better theoretical understanding of race, and those who work to combat racism in society.

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[1] http://www.multiculturecrisis.com/2011/11/28/it-aint-easy-being-blue/

[2] This is discussed explicitly by Titley in relation to the recent invites of Nick Griffin to speak at UCC and TrinityCollegehere: http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/oct/17/nick-griffin-trinity...

[3] pp. 138

[4] Puar, Jasbir (2007) Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times, Durham, NC: Duke University Press pp 21

Dig It Out!

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Title: The Crises of Multicultaralism: Racism in a Neoliberal Age
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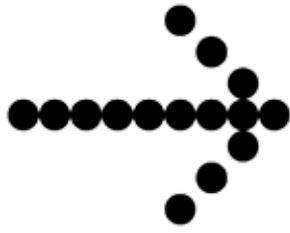
Knuckle

REVIEWED BY SHANE O'CURRY

I approached this film with a lot of trepidation, putting off watching it for weeks. Much of this was down to my being uncomfortable with boxing and fist-fighting of any kind - I just don't enjoy watching people knocking the shit out of each other - but I was also uncomfortable about colluding with a project in which a settled film-maker would bring a settled audience to leer into Travellers' lives. Such fears are not unfounded by any means. The media is full of such 'Big Fat Racist' selective framings of Travellers' lives, served up weekly for the titillation of scoffing settled audiences. Will Ian Palmer's 12 year labour of love prove to be different? Will he champion his subjects by turning his camera angle to break with our society's pervasive and racist framing of Travellers as a problematic, and ultimately inferior culture? Or will he take the easy and well-worn path in the way that Channel 4's "Gypsy Blood" did and grotesquely reframe Travellers (and Romanies, whom it doesn't bother to differentiate from Travellers) as uncultured monsters?

Conversations I had with people about the documentary in those weeks surprised me. Many who I thought would be critical were not so critical. Others were critical, but not for the reasons I thought they would be. My squeamishness was also assuaged; no, the film isn't all that blood thirsty, I was told, it's perfectly watchable. The really captivating drama is in the personalities and in the themes that pervade: pride, honour, tradition, fairness; but the fights were

ok to watch. Not too bad a film, as far as documentaries about Travellers go, an interesting snapshot of people's lives, a sort of record I was told by another person, but it was ultimately exploitative of what is in a very real sense a marginalised community, even if this exploitation was with the collusion of some of the Travellers featured in it. Interestingly, this last person also gave me a bit of advice: "watch out for the accommodation, you can really see a deterioration in people's living conditions as the film goes on". What else does the camera capture besides bare-knuckle fighting?

"Knuckle" is, I can say without hesitation, an absolutely captivating film, taking the viewer into spaces largely hidden from the outside world. Here, we are much more intimate with Traveller men than in any other film (that I have seen, anyway). As if they've forgotten the camera (that is often addressed directly by some protagonists), we see Travellers among Travellers, in all their charisma and tenderness as human beings. In between the fights, we can feel the strength of loyalty and love among brothers, fathers, sons, and cousins; feelings which, along with an acute sense of honour and dignity, in this context, propel the cycle of fist-fighting contests that is the film's subject.

Outside of the fight sequences a perceptive audience could catch a glimpse of the generosity, genuine kindness, respect and hospitality which Travellers, men and women, almost invariably offer each other and outsiders as well. But they might also miss it under the torrent of Youtube challenges and clichéd (if at times positively poetic) big talk which confirm all of our narrow assumptions about what it means to be a Traveller. Other glimpses of what life is really like for Travellers are there too, but appear to have been treated as even less relevant to the subject matter. Women and women's voices feature at best as an afterthought, as though a male narrative about a male-dominated activity is the only one that counts.

The other thing that is striking is, as I had been told it would be, the evidence of the deterioration in condi-

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tions on Traveller sites. The footage of the same west Dublin halting site where the film's main protagonist, James Quinn McDonagh, lives, shot over the 12-year period in which the film was made, traces a marked decline in conditions. This is sadly the only evidence in the film of the larger processes that shape the drama which the film so brilliantly captures. Conditions for Travellers have been worsening steadily, not just since the bubble burst in 2007, but as far back as the 2002 Anti Trespass Act (the decision by local authorities to move away from accommodating Travellers at halting sites) and, further back, into the Irish and British States' long sordid histories of neglected rights and of the coerced settlement of Travellers. This, as in so many films about Travellers, is the great untold story in "Knuckle" and more's the pity for it not being told. Without this back-story, there is no context for understanding the frustration and indignity which drive the plot so fervently. Were such a context to be made explicit in the film, "fair fights" could be understood as an integral part of Travellers' struggle to defend their culture and set of codes, ways which are honourable in as many ways as settled ways are honourable. Instead, the viewer uses what s/he has available in order to make sense of the plot: the received ideas that are fed to us daily about Travellers. The conclusion it is tempting to reach is that there is a problem with Traveller culture and in their inability to adjust. Lamentably, Ian Palmer's camera has merely re-framed Charles Haughey's "Itinerant Problem" albeit in a moving and captivating way.

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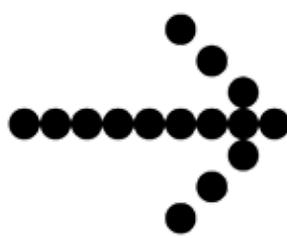
INTERVIEW WITH ALAN MACSIMÓIN OF THE IRISH ANARCHIST HISTORY ARCHIVE

Q: Can you give us a brief description of the project, say what the idea behind it is and how it started?

A couple of us were talking last year about how our history should be preserved, and decided that our contribution would be making available an online archive of magazines, pamphlets, papers and books from and about anarchist organisations in Ireland, from their early beginnings in the 1880s through to today. If we don't record our own history, who will?

We hope it will be a useful contribution towards developing a history of anarchism in Ireland, and will be a help to those researching our movement's politics and activities. We also hope that it will help interested people to understand the various tendencies and currents within Irish anarchism. Additionally, it provides an opportunity to consider how the same themes recur again and again and how both problems and solutions may have been already identified and arrived at.

We started by collecting together the material we already possessed, got a wordpress blog, and went online last October.

Q: I've noticed you've tried to provide background information about the magazines you've put up, the groups that produced them, and what they're discussing. Presumably you're as keen to share the knowledge you have as well as merely show the documents?

There is a big difference between a magazine with 100 readers and one with 10,000, or one that published two or three issues and one that published for twenty or thirty years. Circulation and lifespan can give us some idea of how popular or influential a paper was. So, we try to give that sort of background information where we can be sure that our information is accurate.

We provide pdfs of the original material rather than just the text of articles, as the physical look of a publication can give an added sense of the times.

It's not a 'one way street' where readers just read. We encourage our readers to use the 'leave a comment' facility to add more information, share memories or talk about the politics of the publications we post.

Q: If someone was thinking of doing something similar, what advice would you give them?

Anyone with access to a scanner and a PC can do it. What is important is that any information given is accurate and not just guesswork or hearsay.

There are all sorts of possibilities, for instance you could aim for a collection of material by and about anarchists in your town, your union, your college, or in a particular struggle.

Q: Can you briefly tell us how you do it?

It's not difficult. We learnt how to do the technical stuff within a few days, mainly by trial and error. The scanner we use is a cheap home model we picked up in Tesco and the basic blog is free. There are just two of us at present and we spend a couple of hours a week doing it.

Now that we have been up and running for a few months readers have started to send us pdfs of almost forgotten material they had put away in attics and under beds. This week we even received one from a comrade in Australia.

Q: What resolution are you scanning at? And are you saving images as jpegs, or scanning straight to pdf?

We scan straight to pdf at a resolution of 300ppi (pixels per inch). However if anyone has advice on a method that maintains image clarity but uses less memory we'll welcome it. We are not technical wizards, so keep any suggestions very simple.

Q: You have lots of periodicals waiting to scan, and you've also put up some ephemera. How long do you think it will take, and what further plans do you have for the project?

Yes, we have lots of material to scan and post, including complete and almost complete runs of Workers Solidarity, Red & Black Revolution, Irish Anarchist Review, Anarchist News, Outta Control, RAG, Black Star, Antrim Alternative, Ainriail (both the Belfast and Frontline Collective versions), Black Rag, Anarcho-Communist, Resistance (all three versions), Organise!, Solidarity Bulletin, No Masters, Working Class Resistance. Also pamphlets, leaflets, stickers and more.

We are also tracking down very early stuff like the interview with Kropotkin in the Freeman's Journal (the main daily newspaper of the day) in 1887, and the Irish language translation of at least one of his books in the same period.

It's an endless project as one interesting find often leads to another, and our movement keeps producing new publications. Also the mainstream press over years has had news reports and letters, ranging from the good to the stupid to the downright dishonest, and that continues. Just recently the Irish Examiner described one Workers Solidarity Movement person as a member of the Irish parliament!

http://irishanarchisthistory.wordpress.com/

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